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FUEL PRICE NEARS ALL-TIME HIGH AS OIL COS HIKE RATES

Petrol price was hiked by 26 paise a litre and diesel by 25 paise, according to a price notification from oil marketing companies

INCREASE IN TANDEM WITH CRUDE OIL PRICES

The price change was effected by state-owned fuel retailers after a rise in crude prices. Brent crude rose to $53.94 a barrel on Wednesday on the back of Saudi Arabia's decision to cut daily production by 1 million barrels. The highest petrol price in India was recorded on October 4, 2018 when one litre cost ₹91.34 in Mumbai. At that time, Brent was trading at $85.45

IMPACT ON INDIA'S IMPORT BILL

- To cool prices, the government had in 2018 cut excise duty
- According to reports, every dollar per barrel increase in crude prices will raise India's oil import bill by ₹10,700 crore
- Industry data show that US crude stockpiles fell last week, which further aided the surge in crude prices in the international market

₹86.79
THE PRICE OF ONE LITRE OF PETROL IN BENGALURU ON WEDNESDAY

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

ORIGIN TRACING

WHO rebukes China over blocking virus probe team

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

MONTHS after grandstanding at the World Health Organization, saying it was ready allow an expert team to probe the origins of the deadly coronavirus, China denied them entry, drawing a rare rebuke from WHO chief Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Better known as China's poodle, Tedros said, "Today, we learned that Chinese officials have not yet finalised the necessary permissions for the team's arrival in China. I'm very disappointed with this news, given that two members had already begun their journeys and others were not able to travel at the last minute, but had been in contact with senior Chinese officials."

In what was seen as sharp line, given his pro-China leaning, Tedros said he had 'made it clear' that the mission was a priority for the WHO. Tedros had last year failed to take China to task for delayed reporting of the outbreak and kept dragging his feet on declaring it a pandemic, drawing international ridicule.

The virus has since infected over 85 million people worldwide and killed close to 2 million. A 10-member team of experts from Japan, Qatar, Germany, Vietnam, Russia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Australia, the UK and the US was to travel to Wuhan, the epicentre of Covid-19. Since origin-tracing is complicated business, a crack team was put together for the task.

Later, an embarrassed China acknowledged that there could be some misunderstanding over granting timely permission to WHO's experts, but gave no indication about when it will allow them in.

Jobs are back as K'taka economy rebounds

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

WITH the economy bouncing back after months of slowdown, the job scene seems to be looking up, both in the private as well as government sectors. With employers getting more work, they are looking to hire more staff.

After the lockdown was imposed in March 2020, scores of people lost their jobs and with many businesses shut, employers could not make any fresh hiring. The economic slowdown, triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown, had forced the government as well as private sectors to freeze recruitment till September. Except for essential medical services, all other government appointments had been put on hold. But the tide seems to be turning over the past few weeks with government agencies as well as private businesses looking to hire more employees.

Many government departments, including the Women and Child Development, Energy and Public Works Departments, the Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Ltd (KPTCL) and a few others have invited applications for various posts. Recently, Deputy CM and PWD Minister Govind Karjol had said they are taking steps to recruit 950 junior engineers on contract basis through agencies. The KPTCL has called for applications from engineering graduates for 125 posts of apprentices. Sources in the CMO said the overall situation is stabilising and applications for lowers posts are being called, most of it on contract basis.

In the private sector, the demand for unskilled and skilled labour in the construction sector, automobile and manufacturing industries is increasing.

CONTINUED ON: P4

UPTICK IN HIRING

GOVT JOBS

PWD: 950 engineers

KPTCL: 125 Engineering Graduate apprentice

Department of Women and Child Welfare: 340 Anganwadi workers

India Post, Karnataka circle: 2,443 Gramin Dev Sevak

PVT SECTOR

Demand for skilled and unskilled workers

Hospitality, automobile real estate sectors seeing upswing

Koppal toy cluster to create 20,000 jobs

GREY SKIES

Bengaluru reported unseasonal rain in just a little over five hours on Wednesday, recording 9 mm up to 5.30pm. According to the Met, the showers were caused by an easterly trough. Rain will continue up to Sunday| VINOD KUMAR T | REPORT: P2

PU II EXAMS IN MID-MAY, SSLC IN EARLY JUNE

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE board exams for II Pre-University Course (PUC II) will be held in the second week of May and for the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) in the first week of June, Primary and Secondary Education Minister S Suresh Kumar announced on Wednesday.

Earlier, in view of the Covid-19 situation, Minister S Suresh Kumar had announced that the SSLC and PUC 2021 examinations will not be conducted in March. "The exams will be held in the month of May and June for PUC and SSLC students, respectively" a release from the minister said. CONTINUED ON: P2

Warnock

Ossoff

DEMOCRAT 49 — 51 NEEDED FOR CONTROL — REPUBLICAN 50

Warnock wins, Ossoff leads in runoff race; with House of Representatives already in his grip, Biden can push challenging legislative agenda easily

Dems set to control Senate too

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

The Democratic Party is on course to taking control of the Senate, which is crucial for United States President-elect Joe Biden to push his legislative agenda, with the Georgia elections tipping the balance in the party's favour.

Major US media outlets have already declared Pastor Raphael Warnock as the winner, while fellow Democrat Jon Ossoff is comfortably leading in the second seat over Republican Senator David Perdue.

Warnock beat Republican Senator Kelly Loeffler to become the first African-American to represent Georgia — a slavery state in the US Civil War — in the US Senate. He is also the first Democrat to win the Senate race from Georgia in over 20 years.

The election in Georgia is being rerun thanks to the state's rule that a candidate must take 50% of the vote to win. In the November 2020 general election, none of the candidates could meet that threshold.

As things stand now, Democrats would need to take both the seats in Georgia to gain full control of Congress, while the Republicans need to win just one to retain the Senate.

Ossoff has declared victory but no major news outlet has projected him as the winner.

With the result of the Perdue versus Ossoff yet to be called in, the 100-member Senate now has 50 seats for the Republican Party and 49 for the Democrats.

At the time of going to press, Ossoff had secured 22,13,099 votes, over 17,500 more than Perdue. If elected, 33-year-old Ossoff will be the youngest member in the US Senate.

If both Republicans and the Democrats end up having 50 seats each in the Senate, then Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, in her capacity as the Vice Chairman who presides over the Senate meetings, can cast the crucial vote in favour of the Democrats.

Gaining control of the Senate will help Biden in what he intends to do as President with his party being in a comfortable position to set the legislative agenda.

They will be able to have their say in Senate committees, call hearings, and decide which items get top priority.

It will also help them push through the ambitious proposals addressing climate change and health care.

KEY QUESTIONS

Why the runoff?
Georgia rules mandate that the winning candidate gets at least 50% of the votes polled, which did not happen in the November polls

What is the situation now?
Democrats are coursing towards creating a 50-50 tie with Republicans in the Senate, picking up one seat and leading in another

Which party stands to gain?
Democrats of course, since Vice President-elect Kamala Harris would hold the tie-breaking vote in the Senate

Since when will the Senate be in Democrats' control?
The Senate will be in Democrats' control for the first time since 2014

What does it mean for President-elect Joe Biden?
The Senate win will help him carry out his early legislative agenda since the House of Representatives is already in Democrats' pocket

What does it mean for Trump?
He is already being blamed by Republicans for mess up, as he kept peddling baseless claims that Georgia's electoral systems were rigged, turning off the voters

No stay on anti-love jihad law, but SC to examine it

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to stay new laws introduced in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand to punish interfaith marriages based on religious conversion, but agreed to examine them.

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India S A Bobde issued notices to both state governments on petitions challenging the love jihad ordinance in Uttar Pradesh and the Freedom of Religion Act, 2018 in Uttarakhand. The court also issued notice to the Centre on two petitions filed by advocate Vishal Thakre and Teesta Setalvad's NGO Citizens for Justice and Peace.

Thakre's PIL said, "The Ordinance passed by the State of Uttar Pradesh and law passed by Uttarakhand are against the public policy and society at large and violates basic structure of the Constitution."

Senior advocate C U Singh, who appeared for Setalvad's NGO, sought a stay on the UP ordinance, saying "Rampaging mobs are moving around lifting people from marriage ceremonies. This ordinance requires prior reporting of marriages and the burden of proof is on the individual."

An artistic impression of the new Anubhava Mantapa which will come up in Basavakalyan

The day will be etched in the annals of history as it marks the commencement of work on the new Anubhava Mantap. The construction will be completed within two years and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be invited to inaugurate it

BS Yediyurappa, Chief Minister

Anubhava Mantapa to come up in 2 years: CM

RAMKRISHNA BADSESHI
@ Basavakalyan

THE Anubhava Mantapa, conceived originally by 12th century social reformer Basavanna, will spring back to life again with Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa laying the foundation stone for it on Wednesday.

When completed in about two years' time, the Anubhava Mantapa will have will have state-of-the-art robotics system, air-conditioning using natural resources, a tower resembling a Shiva Linga on top of the building, a Dasoha Bhavan, a themed terrace garden, levitating statues and an open air theatre among other facilities. The structure will come up on 7.5 acres of land and the construction is estimated to cost Rs 500 crore.

Laying the foundation stone, the CM said the day will be etched in the annals of history as it marks the commencement of work on the new Anubhava Mantap. The construction will be completed within two years and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be invited to inaugurate it. In the coming days, the government will release Rs 100 crore for the purpose, the CM announced. The task of supervising the work has been entrusted to the senior BJP leader Basavaraj Patil Sedam. P4

BIRD FLU
KARNATAKA ON HIGH ALERT

The state government has restricted entry of poultry products from Kerala into Karnataka after bird flu cases were reported in the neighbouring state | P7

UP horror: Woman raped, killed in temple

NAMITA BAJPAI @ Lucknow

THE badlands of western Uttar Pradesh saw yet another gangrape and murder, this time of a 50-year-old anganwadi worker in Badaun district, with horrific brutalities perpetrated on her in a reminder of the Nirbhaya case.

The woman was allegedly raped and brutalised within a temple premises by three men, including the priest, and left to die outside her house on Sunday. While the priest, Baba Satyanarayan Das, is on the run, the other two perpetrators — Ved Ram and Yashpal — have been arrested. The incident was reported from a village in the Ughaiti police station area in Badaun.

The victim's post-mortem examination revealed grievous injuries in her private parts. Her left ribs and a leg were also broken while one lung had ruptured as it was apparently hit with a heavy object. A rod was inserted into her private parts causing fatal damage to her internal organs. The autopsy said the woman died due to excessive bleeding.

The villagers and the victim's family alleged SHO Ravindra Pratap Singh did not reach the spot even after a complaint was lodged. Initial investigation revealed the victim's body was sent for post-mortem on Monday afternoon, 18 hours after the incident.

The 50-year-old woman, who had gone to a temple on Sunday, was found dead under mysterious circumstances. Family members have accused the temple priest and his accomplices of raping and murdering her

SSP Sankalp Sharma

UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has ordered an inquiry into the incident by the Special Task Force of UP Police and directed the ADG of Bareilly zone to submit a detailed report. SHO Singh has been suspended.

Four teams have been formed to nab the priest and a bounty of ₹50,000 has been announced on his arrest.

CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

Producers look at OTT platforms for Kannada stars

A SHARADHAA @ Bengaluru

ARE producers of Kannada films with big stars planning to take a digital leap? As the lights seem to be going out on theatre releases with cinemas operating only at 50 per cent capacity due to the pandemic, the demand by theatre owners, and other problems, the producers may go Over-The-Top (OTT).

Some producers who met at a private hotel on Wednesday are looking at the OTT platforms as an option, which was one of the highlights of their discussions. Producers including Vijay Kiragandur, KP Srikanth, Jayanna, Surappa Babu, B K Gangadhar, Manjunath Gowda, Umapathy S and Karthik Gowda were among those present.

The producers are more worried that the theatre owners are demanding to abolish the earlier trade policy of just rentals and instead wanting a percentage share in the collections. This, however, is not acceptable to the producers. "The current demand of the theatre owners on having a percentage share will eat into the collections. We are okay to release the films as per the earlier norm," said one of the producers who was present at the meeting.

"With the crisis we are facing, we won't be able to meet the theatre owners' demand. So we have no option but to head to streaming platforms, who are ready to pay a good amount to have star films," he said.

Currently, the films that are getting ready for release this year are Darshan's Roberrt, produced by Umapathy, Puneeth Rajkumar's Yuvarathnaa, and Yash starrer, KGF Chapter 2 produced by Vijay Kiragandur among others. CONTINUED ON: P7

EXPRESS READ

Another setback for BSY in land case

Bengaluru: In another setback for Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa, the High Court has directed a trial court to proceed against him and two other accused in a land denotification case. P7

Bidding for spectrum auction from March 1

New Delhi: Bidding for the 6th round of spectrum auction for radiowaves worth Rs 3.92 lakh crore will start from March 1, according to a notice issued by the Department of Telecom on Wednesday. P13